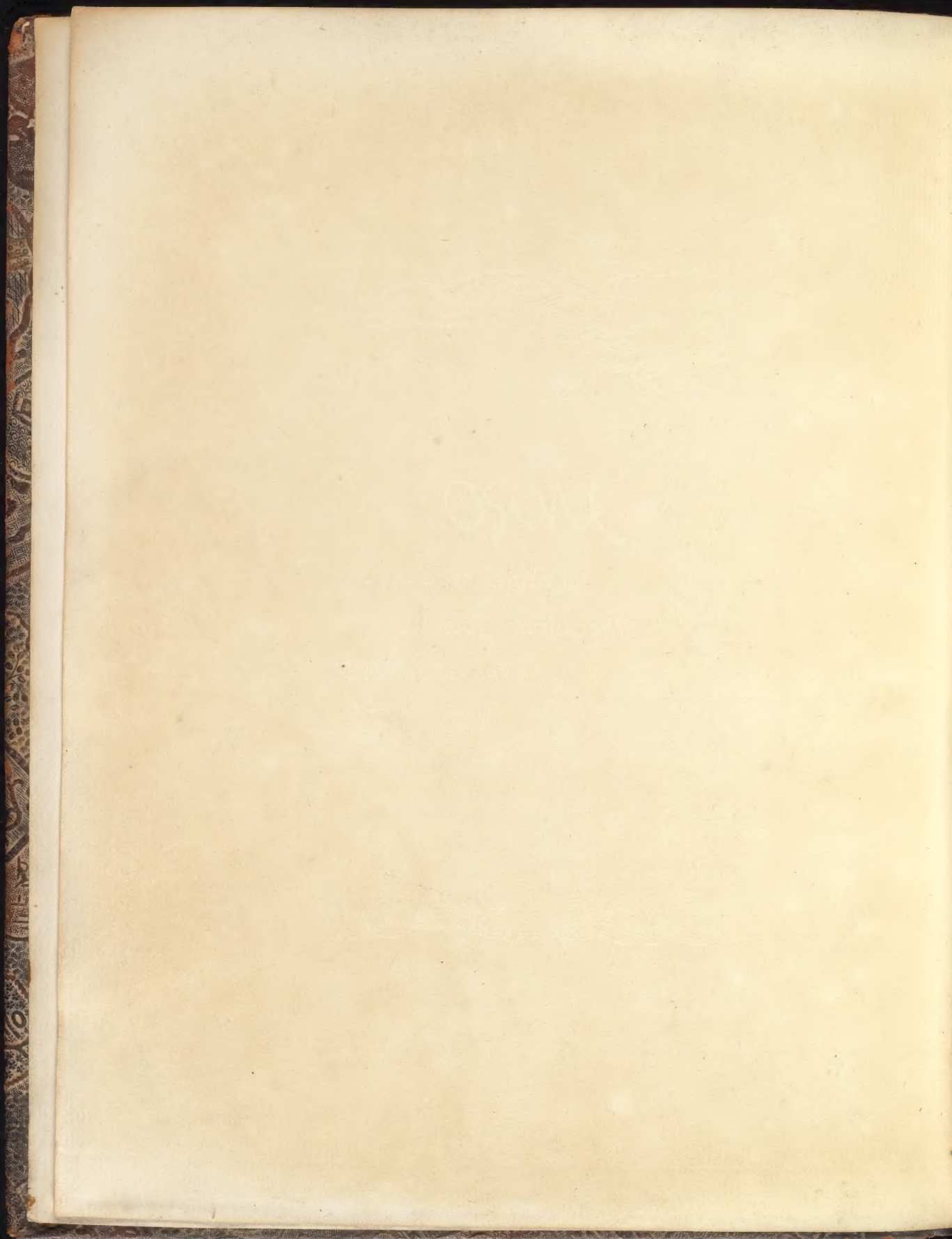
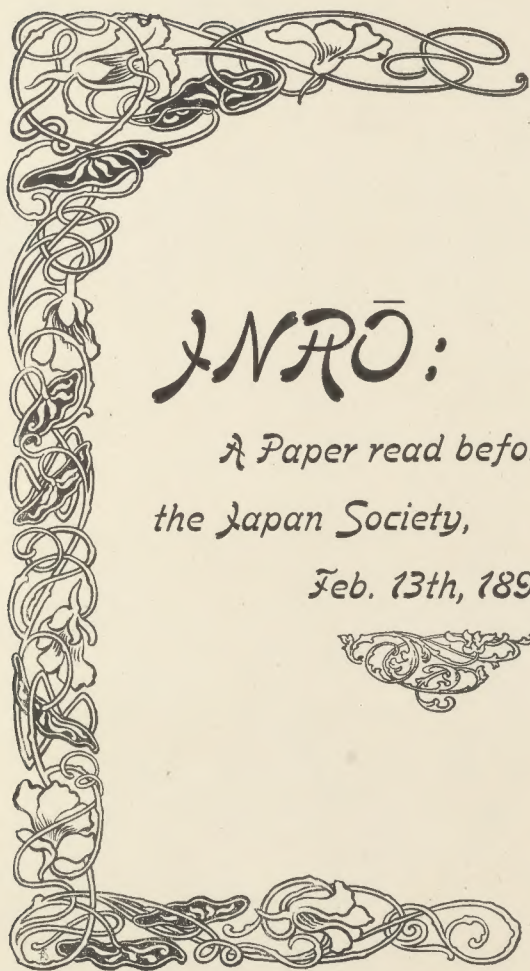


AJ, 100, Net

[Tomkinson, Michael]

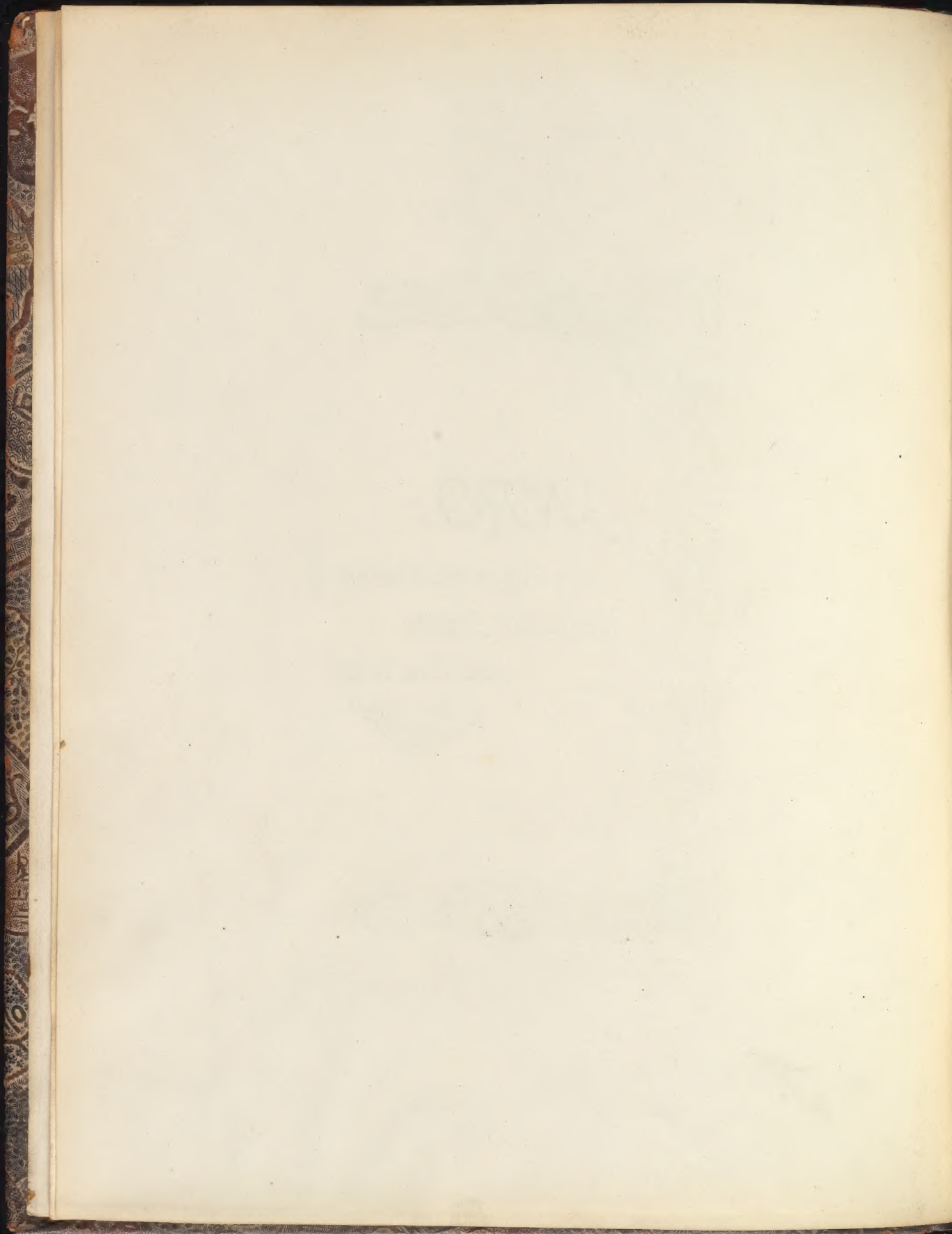




INARŌ:

*A Paper read before
the Japan Society,*

Feb. 13th, 1895.



A PAPER ON INRŌ:

READ BEFORE THE

JAPAN SOCIETY,

February 13th, 1895.



AN encyclopædia published in Tōkyō some few years since, quoting from the *Shikisō*, an old Japanese work, says "YAMATO-DAKE," a celebrated warrior who died A.D. 1113, carried, attached to the scabbard of his sword, a bag containing flint and steel; this bag was called *hi-uchi-bukoro*." At a later period we find that seals and medicine were also stored in a receptacle of this kind. The seal was of great importance and of general use. From the 17th century its impress has been affixed to documents in place of, or in addition to the signature. This custom was introduced, as were many others, from China at a remote period, and, as you know, the Japanese are likewise indebted to their Celestial neighbours for instruction in many arts; to-day they are endeavouring to return the compliment by teaching the Chinese the art of modern warfare. The original seal boxes, or *inrō*, (*in* meaning "seal" and *rō* "case") were square, and frequently took the form of a nest of boxes of from two to five divisions, and generally of carved lacquer about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches square. In this box were kept the seal or seals, and also the pad for stamping the impression. I am dwelling a minute on the seal box, as from it we obtain the familiar word *inrō*. In this early time another receptacle for medicine was also

used called *yakuro* (*yaku* meaning "medicine"); this was generally shaped like a covered bowl, and with the seal box formed part of the decorative arrangement in the *toko-no-ma*. The *toko-no-ma* is a raised recess reserved for conventional decoration, and is found in every Japanese house to-day as it was in the time of the ASHIKAGA Shoguns in the fifteenth century. The early seal boxes were square, but the *Kokkwa* (a monthly art magazine which is published in Tōkyō) quotes an extract from a book written by Sōami and Nōami, painters and critics of fine art, in the year 1476, accompanied by drawings of various seal boxes (*inro*) which show that not only square but also round shapes were then used. From these early boxes, used for seals and placed with objects in the *toko-no-ma*, came the appellation *inrō* because these shapes were adopted; and the majority of *inrō* follow with modifications these forms. In the *Keicho* period, 1596-1611, the use of the *hi-uchi-bukoro* or bag I first mentioned was partially discontinued, and the portable medicine box called *inrō* came into fashion and general use; prior to this date there is no record of *inro* being worn suspended by a cord from the *obi* or sash. The earliest *inrō* we have any certain information about date from early in the seventeenth century, and were doubtless made of lacquer. I show examples here of *inrō* of this period—many have an encrusted decoration in metal (generally silver), of dragons and other mythical subjects on lacquer. These *inrō* are rarely signed, but in my collection one is signed Kizō, and dated 1640; another of the same period is







signed IGARASHI DOHO. These signatures are on the lacquer, and I find in a book published 1878, the *Kogei Shirō* (a handbook of Japanese industries) that about the year 1646 SEKI Socho, of Kyōto, signed his name on his work in lacquer; prior to this signatures were invariably engraved. Other kinds of lacquer were also used, and there are specimens in the collection in *Suri-hagashi*, or rubbed lacquer; this consists of a coat of red lacquer on black; in places the red is rubbed down exposing the under layer of black; also in *Raden*—an inlay of *awabi* shell and gold: and in some *inrō* we have a combination of the two. Later (although the majority of *inrō* were made in lacquer) we find other materials employed, various metals, faïence and porcelain, carved wood, ivory, and a fungus called by the Japanese *Reishi* (sacred fungus), and often spoken of as *Saru-no-koshi-kake* (monkey's chair), also shagreen made of fish skin, occasionally the bark of trees, and (but rarely) rock crystal and agate. Sometimes the *inrō* itself is in silver or other metal and the outer case in lacquer or *vice versa*. The *inrō* was worn suspended by a silken cord from the *obi* or sash, and, to prevent it slipping through the girdle, there is attached to the cord a toggle called a *netsuké*, the evolution of which was so ably treated by our friend Mr. HUISEN at the last meeting. The earliest *netsuké* of which we can find any description were small gourds dried, sometimes lacquered; later, other materials were used, wood, ivory, rock crystal, agate, onyx, cloisonné enamel, metal, nuts, and other substances elaborately carved. Many *netsuké* are gems of art

work delighting every one. At the sides of the *inrō* are holes as guides for the cord; occasionally the guides are in silver attached to the lacquer. Between the *inrō* and the *netsuké* is a bead called *ojimé*, which gathers both cords together, and can be moved either way; these little objects, these *ojimé* are often exquisite examples of great works on a small scale. With the *inrō* was often worn in the girdle a pouch called *kinchaku* for carrying seals, keys and money; and also the *tabako-iré*, a pouch, as its name notes, for carrying tobacco, which was introduced about 1680. A wallet was used early in the eighteenth century, carried in the folds of the *kimono*, or dress. The *inrō* and *kinchaku* then became less fashionable, and the *inrō* was less frequently worn, except as a decorative appendage on occasions of state and ceremony. It is fortunate for collectors that this change took place, as with such hard usage as is indicated by the condition of many of the early *inrō*, the valuable examples of the great lacquerers would have lost their rare artistic beauty.

Lacquer was preferred for *inrō*, as it preserves the drugs kept in the *inrō* from drying up. On some examples, the finish and make are so perfect that it is difficult to see the divisions without separating them. Thus a writer in the *Shōken Kishō* says, "In verifying the best work of the Kajikawa, the Koma, and other great artists, note how each section fits." These masters were careful to lacquer only on the best work. The partitions do indeed fit with such marvellous accuracy that the line of division does not show till the sections are drawn



work, weighting every one. At the ends of the cords are beads as guides for the cord: occasionally the guides are in silver pressed into the lacquer. In some cases the cords are joined by a bead called *ojimé*, which gathers both cords together, and can be moved either way; these little objects, these *ojimé* are often exquisite examples of great works on a small scale. With the *inrô* was often worn in the girdle a pouch called *kinchaku* for carrying small things, and in the early times a small pouch for carrying notes, for carrying money, but it was introduced about 1680. A wallet was used early in the eighteenth century, carried in the folds of the *kimono*, or dress. The *inrô* and *kinchaku* then became less noticeable, and the *inrô* was less frequently worn, except as a decorative appendage on occasions of state and ceremony. It is fortunate for collectors that this change took place, as with such hard usage as is indicated by the condition of many of the early *inrô*, the valuable examples of the great lacquerers would have lost their rare artistic beauty.

Lacquer was preferred for *inrô*, as it preserves the drugs kept in the *inrô* from drying up. On some examples, the finish and make are so perfect that it is difficult to see the divisions without separating them. Thus a writer in the *Shohen Kishô* says, "In verifying the best work of the Kajikawa, the Koma, and other great artists, note how each section fits." These remarks were certainly frequently on the best work. The partitions are indeed fit with such marvellous accuracy that the line of division does not show till the sections are drawn



apart, and the sections are interchangeable. The celebrated *inrō* makers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were fond of copying works of painters, and often acknowledged their debt by inscribing on the *inrō* the name of the artist to whom they owed the design, and so in a collection of *inrō* we have illustrations of the history, mythology, and folklore of Japan rendered with beautiful harmony of colour and wonderful profusion of detail. The process of lacquering is not for me to dwell upon; it has been treated thoroughly by Quin and others, and anyone interested in the subject will find a capital paper in the *Transactions* of the Asiatic Society of Japan, vol. 9. I also commend to you my friend Mr. GILBERTSON's article in the Catalogue of the Exhibition held last February at the Burlington Arts Club. But whilst considering the decoration of the *inrō* I must mention some of the different kinds of lacquering. I spoke of carved lacquer as being used for the early seal boxes. Of carved lacquers there are *Tsuishu*, or carved red lacquer; *Tsuikoku*, or carved black lacquer; and *Guri*, which consists of successive layers of different colours; through these are carved channels of a V shape which describe patterns of curves and scrolls, and serve to show the different layers of which the lacquer is composed. *Chinkinbori* is lacquer on which a design is engraved, generally with a rat's tooth, and into the lines thus produced gold is rubbed. Some *inrō*, again, have the lacquer inlaid in different shades or colours. The groundwork of many is aventurine

(in Japanese *nashiji*, meaning "ground like a pear rind"); this is produced by gold finely dusted on to the lacquer. On others the gold is inlaid in small fragments and called *Hira-kané*. There is also *Hira-makiyé*, where the ornamentation is in flat gold on the ground, and *Taka-ma-kiyé*, where the design is in relief. *Togidashi* is polished or rubbed lacquer, with the design without outline and often in various colours, a very delicate process, producing in the hands of Shunshō, or one of the Koma, a lovely effect. There are many other kinds of lacquer, but I do not wish to weary you with a subject sufficient in itself for several papers. In a book dated 1688, called "*Shin-Choja-Kio*," we find an interesting passage. A writer, after speaking of the flourishing condition of Tsuruga, a town in the province of Echizen, alludes to the lawlessness of its inhabitants, and says, "It is not wise to carry *inrō* in the streets, as many thieves are wandering about."

I have already spoken of the first lacquerers of *inrō*, and called your attention to certain examples. After these came a school of impressionists, commencing with KOYETSU, who was born in 1558 and began to follow the art of lacquering about 1587. An example (Plate IV., No. 1), decorated with fire-flies, and on the reverse a pier of a bridge, is signed, which is very unusual in the work of Koyetsu; these subjects were frequently used by his pupils, Soyetsu and others. Another is by SOYETSU, a pupil who, I think, excelled his master; it is signed in full, TSUCHIDA SOYETSU, and inscribed as being made



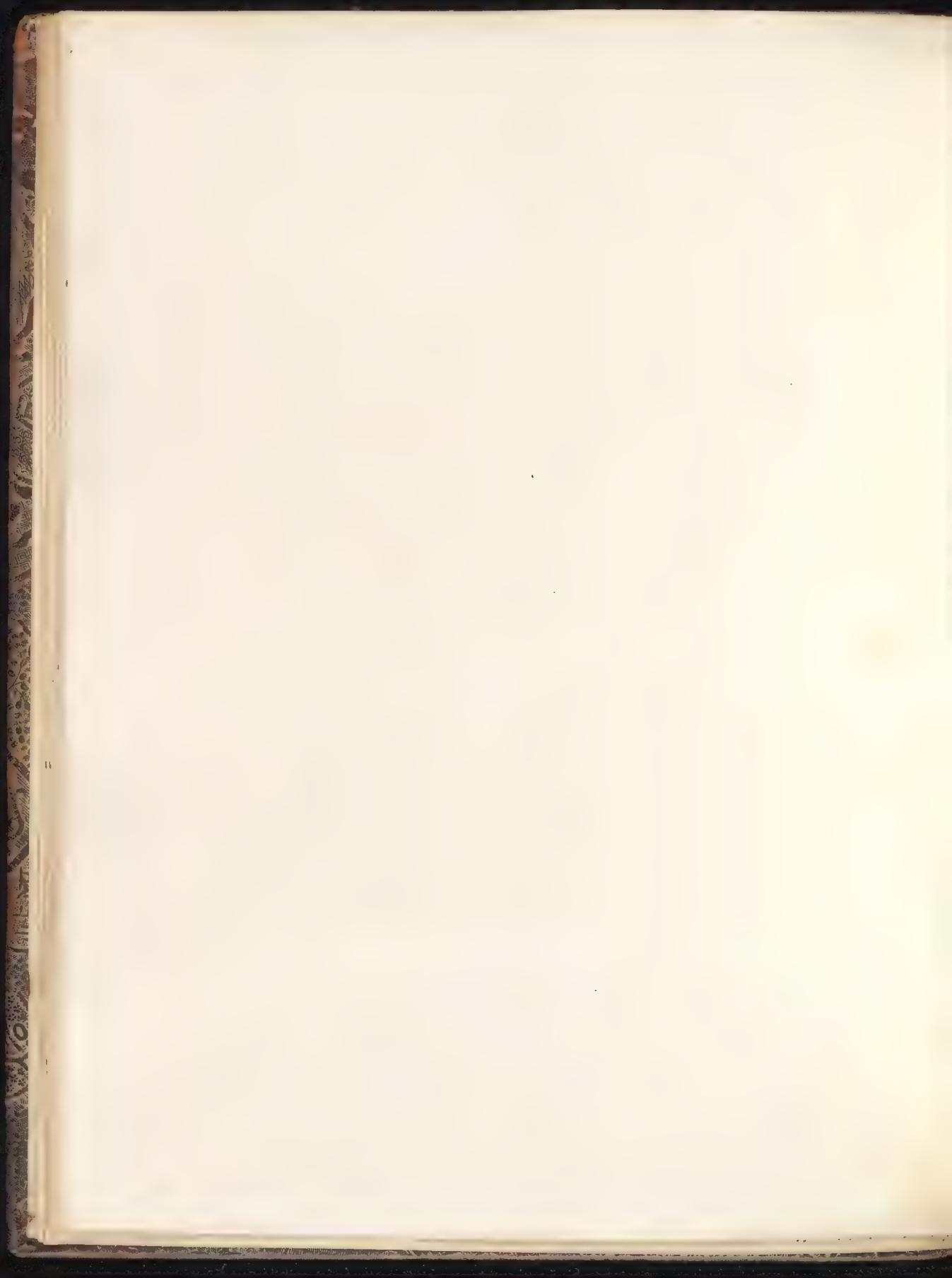
(in Japanese *nishiji*, meaning "ground like a pear rind"); this is produced by gold finely dusted on to the lacquer.

[illegible]

I have already spoken of the first lacquerers of *inro*, and called your attention to certain examples. After these came a school of impressionists, commencing with Koyetsu, who was born in 1558 and began to follow the art of lacquering about 1587. An example (Plate IV., No. 1), decorated with fire-flies, and on the reverse a pier of a bridge, is signed, and is very unusual in the work of Koyetsu; these subjects are not found in his other pieces. The artist is, I think, by SOYETSU, a pupil who, I think, excelled his master.



PLATE III



in his 81st year (Plate I., No. 3). An owl is perched on a hoe, the agricultural implement in use to-day, with which most of the farm cultivation seems to be done. *Awabi* shell and lead are inlaid, and gold lacquer used on a black ground. Another with geese flying has a similar inlay on a ground of black lacquer (Plate IV., No. 3).

We now come to the most celebrated impressionist of the 17th century, OGATA KŌRIN, celebrated both as painter and lacquerer. As a maker of *inrō* he cannot be seen to advantage; to be appreciated he should be studied in his larger works, notably his writing boxes (*suzuri-bako*); on these objects we find him at his best. On *inrō* his designs are far too often rude and conventional; for instance, in Plate II. No. 5, of a court carriage inlaid in lead and shell on a ground of gold. Some subjects are almost unintelligible, but here is one (Plate III. No. 6) decorated with storks and bamboo in lead and mother-of-pearl on a ground of rich gold of a beautiful colour. Kōrin was celebrated for this ground, and we find in it specks of gold enhancing the richness. Kōrin adopted the best methods of Soyetsu, and varied his inlay, as in this example (Plate V, No. 3), by placing the shell in high relief, and often formed the object in one piece instead of placing small pieces vertically as did Koyetsu and Soyetsu. Works are frequently signed Kōrin which are palpable forgeries, his style rendering bad imitations easy, just as some of our Western painters produce daubs and call their work impressionist to hide the fact that they cannot either draw or paint, half-taught and often idle

craftsmen, who follow the coarser and uglier forms of art, affecting to disdain the studies they do not themselves practise. Kōrin's paintings and lacquer are highly prized by the Japanese and many have a true artistic feeling, while others are eccentricities more curious than faithful or beautiful. RITSUO, a very clever and original artist, born in 1663, studied under Kōrin. He was also a celebrated potter, learning the art from Kōrin's brother Kenzan, and was very fond of inlaying his lacquer work with pottery; the chrysanthemums on this *inro* are in pottery inlaid on black lacquer (Plate V. No. 2). He was also a celebrated painter, carver, and worker in metal. A badger was a very favourite subject with Ritsuo and his followers, and is so treated in one here by Ritsuo (Plate I. No. 2), and in an example by a late follower of his, Kōzan, who produced some excellent work. Among the examples in my collection is an *inro* dated 1742, and inscribed "made at 80 years of age." Of YOSEI's work, a contemporary of Ritsuo, I show one with utensils for the tea ceremony, inlaid with ivory and decorated in colours (Plate IV, No. 2). The risers of this *inro* are in *chinkinbori* engraved in gold. Here is another by a pupil of Ritsuo, HANZAN (Plate IV. No. 8). These coins wonderfully reproduce in lacquer the appearance of the originals in metal. The risers of his *inro* are generally in *chinkinbori*. An eminent lacquerer whom I cannot pass over is SHIOMI MASANARI, or MASAZANÉ, as some translators have it. He flourished at the end of the 17th century, and produced very fine work in polished *togidashi*. Another notable



affecting to disdain the studies they do not themselves practise. Many have a true artistic feeling, while others are eccentric. Among the most celebrated potters is Kōrin. He was also a celebrated painter, learning the art from Kōchōrō. His works are in pottery inlaid on black lacquer (Plate V. No. 2). He was also a celebrated painter, carver, and worker in metal. A badger was a very favourite subject with Ritsuo and his followers, and is so treated in one here of Ritsuo (Plate I. No. 2), and in an example by a late follower of his, Kōzan, who produced some excellent work. Among the examples of his work, I show one with utensils for the tea ceremony, inlaid with ivory and decorated in colours (Plate IV. No. 2). The risers of this *iro* are in *chinkinami* engraved in gold. There is another by a pupil of Ritsuo, HANZAN (Plate IV. No. 8). His work is generally in metal. The risers of his *iro* are generally in *chinkinami*. An eminent lacquerer whom I cannot pass over is SHIOMI MASANARI, or MASAZANÉ, as some translators have called him. He produced very fine work in polished *togidashi*. Another notable



example of *togidashi* lacquer is by Shunshō (Plate II. No. 3), one of an eminent family of lacquerers, of whom the first was YAMAMOTO SHUNSHŌ, the author of this piece, who died in 1682; the family continued as masters in this beautiful process into our own time, as I have some fine work I bought through my collector in Japan of a late 19th century Shunshō. The delicate process of *togidashi* lacquer so beautifully rendered by the Shunshō, and the Koma, is nowhere clearly described, and all I can tell you I understand is, that according to the thickness of the layer of lacquer over the gold or colour the gradation of tone is produced, and by rubbing down and polishing afterwards the most lovely effect is obtained. We now come to the family of lacquerers that are my special favourites—the Koma. An example is in my collection (Plate V. No. 8) of the first Koma, Kiui, who was lacquerer to the great Tokugawa Shōgun Iyemitsu, and died in 1663. His son and pupil, Koma KIUHAKU, really founded the Koma school, and this family have produced exquisite work down to our own time. You will find most of the linings of their *inrō* are in red, gold, or both combined. Quin gives the date of Kiuhaku as 1624-1643; this could not be the first Kiuhaku, for he was lacquerer to Tsuneyoshi, who was Shogun 1681-1708, or forty years after Quin states that he died, his death really occurring in 1715. Here is a lovely specimen of Kiuhaku's work in white lacquer on a ground of black (Plate IV. No. 6). Another (Plate III. No. 5) illustrating Kanzan and Jittoku, from a drawing by Hanabusa Itchō, early in 18th century, also by Koma Kiuhaku.

By the same master, but quite in another style (Plate IV. No. 9), is one encrusted in shell with gold lacquer. The family continued to be lacquerers to the *Shōguns*, but on *inrō* after Kiuhaku I find no Koma before Kioriu, a pupil of the fifth Koma, who worked in Yedo (now Tōkyo) in 1772. Then came KOMA KWANSAI, a lacquerer of the first merit, and master of ZESHIN, who was the best of the 19th century lacquerers; Zeshin died in 1891 at the age of 84. Then followed KOMA YASUTADA (Plate II. No. 6, Plate III. No. 3), and I think his work in lacquer is unsurpassed. We now come to another celebrated family, the Kajikawa, founded by KAJIKAWA KIUIRO about 1680, and continuing late into our century. Although they were court lacquerers, our information concerning them is only meagre, whilst their works are very numerous, for KAJIKAWA HISATAKA, TAKAFUSA, HIDETAKA, and others will probably be represented even in a small collection. The Kajikawa are noted for their beautiful work particularly in the linings of the *inrō*, which are generally in *nashiji*, and at times in a *nashiji* flecked with pieces of gold-leaf of irregular shapes crumpled up and imbedded in a transparent reddish lacquer, the colour of gold varying according to the depth of lacquer with which it is covered. Mr. Gilbertson thinks, and I entirely agree with him that this must be the *giobu nashiji* mentioned in the "*Shoken Kishō*" as that for which the Kajikawa were famous. A signed piece which I have is evidently a very early Kajikawa (Plate IV. No. 4), with the cord guides in silver. Another, with primula in gold and silver lacquer, is a good example of the aristocratic *inrō* (Plate IV. No. 5). On another



By the same master, but quite in another style (Plate IV. No. 5). After this I find no lacquerer of the many centuries before Kioriu. After Kihaku I find no Koma before Kioriu a pupil of the 6th century. After Kioriu I find no Koma before Kioriu. Then came Koma Kwansai, a lacquerer of the first merit, and master of Zeshin, who was the best of the 19th century lacquerers; Zeshin died in 1891 at the age of 84. Then followed Koma Yasutada (Plate II. No. 5, Plate III. No. 3) and I think his work is lacquerer's masterpiece. We now come to another lacquerer, the Kajikawa, founded by Kajikawa Kioriu about 1880, and continuing to the present day. Although they were court lacquerers, our information concerning them is only derived from their work. The Kajikawa are noted for their beautiful work particularly in the linings of the *inro*, which are generally in *nashiji*, and at times in *hana-ji*, the use of gold leaf in the shapes crumpled up and imbedded in a transparent reddish lacquer, the colour of gold being removed by the depth of lacquer with which it is covered. Mr. Gilbertson thinks, and I entirely agree with him that this may be the *goma kasho* mentioned in the "*Shoken Kisho*" as that for which the Kajikawa were famous. A signed piece which I have is evidently a very early Kajikawa (Plate IV. No. 4), with the cord guides in silver. Another, with primula in gold and silver lacquer, is a good example of the masterful *inro* (Plate IV. No. 5). Or another



are flowers in white and silver lacquer, with an inlay of shell and gold lacquer on a rich brown ground (Plate I. No. 1). Another is after a design by Hōgen Yeisen (Plate V. No. 7), a painter of the last century; the flowers are in ivory, and the geese on this are inlaid in shell and lacquered in gold and colours. The *inrō* decorated with chrysanthemums (Plate II. No. 4) is signed Hisataka, after a design made by Kōsen, one of the Kano painters.

Many works of an inferior order bear the name of Kajikawa, but of poor work, purporting to be by the Koma, I have seen but little that was not palpably a forgery. Some large unsigned *inrō* I have seen are undoubtedly by the Kajikawa, and were made probably for some of the great *Daimyōs*. An example is also shown of the work of YAMADA TOYOYOSHI (Plate II. No. 1), a clever artist of the last century; the background is in *togidashi*.

Jōi was a celebrated sword-guard worker of the last century, but we occasionally find his work encrusted on lacquer *inrō* (Plate V. No. 9). In most collections will be found examples of that most excellent artist of the 18th century, JŌKASAI, one of the Kajikawa school; he frequently employed metals in relief on *nashiji* lacquer. The skilful worker YōYUSAI brings us into this century; the subject treated here is the Takarabuné (ship of good fortune) (Plate III. No. 2).

KAKŌSAI was another master of the Kajikawa school, and frequently worked with Shibayama, who carved in ivory the

minute faces and hands that Kakōsai mounted in lacquer. He used a seal similar to one of the Kajikawa.

The *inrō* of TATSUKI KOKIO are often large and of unusual shapes. I have one signed and inscribed as made when he was 83 years old. I must mention also cloisonné enamel used on *inrō* by a celebrated family called Hirata, (Plate III. No. 4); these enamels are inlaid on lacquer of gold by Skeigawa. I will now show an *inrō* which is a fine example of minute metal work encrusted on *nashiji* lacquer (Plate I. No. 4); it is signed SEIRYUKEN, but I know nothing of the artist. This *inrō* delayed me in Osaka some time, for it was the treasured possession of a man whose idea of its value was far apart from mine, and we had great difficulty in reconciling them. A collection of *inrō* would not be complete without some in both *Tsuishu* lacquer carved red, and *Tsuikoku* lacquer carved black. This example (Plate IV. No. 7) illustrates both kinds. You will remember I spoke of the early seal boxes as being made in similar lacquer. Nor must we forget those decorated with the very beautiful shell mosaic work called *Raden*, which was applied to some of the earliest *inrō*, as it is to the latest (Plate V. No. 4), this being a 19th century specimen. Another of the 18th century has *Kotobuki*, "long life," inlaid in shell on carved wood (Plate V. No. 5).

Lastly we have those in faïence, for instance, one is in polychrome on Kyōtō pottery, with the edges in lacquer and the risers in wood (Plate V. No. 1), made in the last century; also

in carved ivory such as this with exquisite encrusted work of shell representing doves on a branch of wistaria (Plate V. No. 6); it is 19th century work, probably by one of the Shibayama family. Although the elaboration of inlay on late 19th century *inrō* is scorned by classical collectors, some specimens should be included in every good collection, as they are marvels of exquisite jewel work, with their inlay of various metals, tinted *awabi* shell, coral, malachite, and tortoiseshell (Plate III. Nos. 1 and 2).

I have often thought that the artist artisan of Japan is unconsciously a true disciple of Ruskin, he well knows the grace and preciousness of simple adornment, and his works are like leaves in nature, no two alike; seeming to follow our Art Critic's teaching when he says, "If the materials of ornament are noble, they must be various, and repetition of parts is the sign of utterly bad, hopeless, and base work." The art worker of Japan goes to nature and carefully studies the lovely colours there, unspoiled, always refined and beautiful, and let us hope the commercial spirit will not debase those true principles of decorative art which our friends in Japan know so well.

MICHAEL TOMKINSON, F.R.G.S., F.J.S.

